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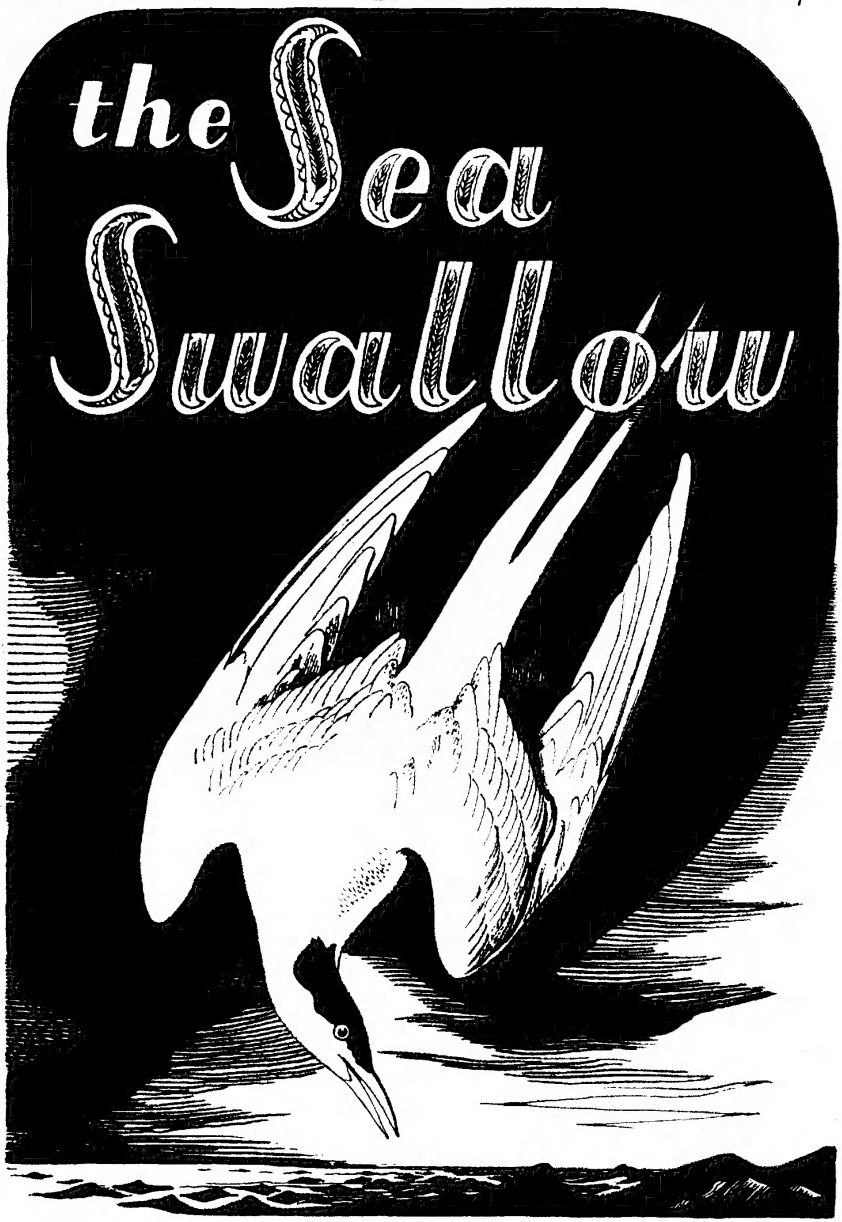

BEING THE ANNUAL REPORT OF THE ROYAL NAVAL BIRD WATCHING SOCIETY

Published December, 1955

ROYAL NAVAL BIRD WATCHING SOCIETY.

(Affiliated to the British Trust for Ornithology)

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GREAT CRESTED GREBE.

Photograph by Sub. Lieut. M. Casement, R.N.

FOREWORD

The R.N.B.W.S. has taken a lead in fostering interest in Bird Watching in Her Majesty's Merchant Navy, and I am glad to see the ready co-operation given by many Shipping Lines and Seafaring Journals in publicising the work of our Society. This report already reflects the increased volume of bird observations from sea now reaching R.N.B.W.S. from correspondents in the Merchant Navy. I hope that this is only the beginning of a wide interest in Marine Ornithology.

A small Society such as ours always faces certain inherent difficulties, and this is particularly applicable to-day. Where the work is undertaken on a voluntary basis by an Active Service Honorary Secretary and Treasurer, and a combined Chairman and Honorary Editor there is clearly a limit to the size of the membership that can be served efficiently on such a basis. To-day, however, our present membership and annual subscription are both too small to support our Society financially, and we need the support of new members. The question of enrolling members of Her Majesty's Merchant Navy within the scope of our present organisation is therefore under active consideration.

Our small membership makes the printing of publications for internal circulation quite uneconomical; with the small balance in our funds the question of the production of the Annual Report, and stocks of Sea Passage Bird Lists, Sea Report Sheets and so on presents an increasingly difficult problem.

We have decided not to limit the supply of these publications to members only.

At this time when interest in Marine Ornithology is clearly increasing I ask for the fullest support from our members. This lies in the prompt payment of subscriptions, in helping to increase membership, and in placing orders for additional copies of our publications.

I hope too, that other interested bodies who may receive complimentary copies of this report will consider taking up copies of R.N.B.W.S. publications.

Lachlan Mackintosh of Mackintosh

Moy Hall, Moy,
Invernesshire. *November*, 1955.

EDITORIAL

It is always a great pleasure to receive news again from members in distant parts of the world and to pass on this information. Major N. A. Beal, Royal Marines, our first Hon. Sec., now living at 3 St. John's Road, Houghton, Johannesburg, hopes that any member coming his way will make a point of looking him up. I hope that in our next Sea Swallow we shall be able to include an article on some South African birds from his pen. V. A. D. Sales, Esq., writes from the Kuwait Oil Company, Ahmadi, Kuwait, Persian Gulf, where he has been compiling notes over a period of three years on more than 120 species of birds passing through a small $6\frac{1}{2}$ acres Agricultural Nursery, 7 miles from the coast.

Pensioner Chief Yeoman of Signals, H. H. Franklin, writing from New Zealand, states roundly that there should be many more members of the Signal branch in our Society, for no other branch has such facilities for observing bird life at sea.

I hope that more members from whom we have received little or no news will get in touch again. At the same time may I thank all those (and the number is increasing) who have contributed notes and information for our records in the course of the year.

The Society's membership remains almost constant; nine new members have joined, whilst six existing members cannot be traced. The present rules for membership by officers and men of the Naval Reserves have recently been widely publicised through the medium of Seafaring Journals. The question of admitting personnel of Her Majesty's Merchant Navy to full membership will come before the Annual General Meeting this year.

ANNUAL REPORT.

Reports from Merchant Navy sources will be included in Sea Swallow from now on. To add interest and value to further reports we welcome a suggestion from James Fisher that a series of live sketches of sea birds by Roger Peterson with descriptions by James Fisher might become a feature of each report.

Printing costs limit the amount of material that can be included in this Report, and the Member's Address List has been omitted intentially.

LECTURES.

I took the opportunity (with some trepidation) of giving two illustrated lectures on the distribution of birds at sea, with special reference to R.N.B.W.S.—one to Charterhouse School, N.H.S., and one to Cadets at the Britannia R.N. College, Dartmouth.

PUBLICATIONS.

The first four revised Sea Passage Bird Lists are now completed and ready for printing. Each contains an appendix giving identification details and a space page for additions and notes. I believe that members would find these well worth taking up, but the cheapest estimate for printing 50 copies of each works out at 1/8d. per copy. If 250 of each were printed the cost would be 1/-. Until we know something of the likely demand printing is being deferred. At the same time the Education Department of Admiralty are interested in the possibility of supply to ships' reference libraries, and should this materialise the cost to an individual member might be less.

G. S. Tuck.

SEA REPORTS

(*Received* 1954/55).

Sea Reports forwarded this year include more than one ocean passage on which no previous records have been received.

We are specially indebted to Captain P. P. O. Harrison, Master of M. V. " Cambridge " (New Zealand Shipping Coy.), for his comprehensive bird report of a sea passage round the world. Once again Lt. Cdr. G. S. Willis, R.N.R., M. V. " British Oak " (British Tanker Coy., Ltd.), has forwarded several detailed reports, together with many references to land birds observed during passages. An avairy is provided in " British Oak " as a rest centre for tired migrants.

Many isolated reports ranging from Bats to Bitterns have been received; some of the more unusual examples are recorded in "Random reports from the Oceans." The Society thanks all those who have forwarded observations.

World Sea Passage Captain P. P. O. Harrison.	*Oct.* 1954 *to Mar.* 1955. U.K. to Australia via Suez. Thence to New Zealand, Panama and U.K.
Indian Ocean. Lt.-Cdr. G. S. Willis, R.N.R.	*Feb. to Mar.* 1954. Bahrein to Rangoon and return.
Arabian Sea through Mediterranean to U.K. Lt.-Cdr. G. S. Willis, R.N.R.	*Mar. to April*, 1954. Kuwait to U.K.
Indian Ocean and South Atlantic. Lt.-Cdr. G. S. Willis, R.N.R.	*Nov. to Dec.* 1954. Persian Gulf to River Plate. *Dec. to Jan.* 1954-55. Notes on return passage.
South Pacific and North Atlantic. Fourth Officer M. J. D'oyly.	*Feb. to April* 1955. New Zealand to U.K.
Ocean Birds. Sub.-Lt. C. B. Thompson, R.N.R.	Notes during 2½ years service in S.S. " Perim."
North Atlantic. Capt. A. J. F. Colquhoun, M.B.E.	*Apr., June, Aug.* 1955. Three separate passages between Glasgow and New York, Baltimore and Avonmouth. 94 observations.

NOTES ON SEA REPORTS

(*In this section the scientific name is shown in brackets on the first occasion only that the species is mentioned.*—Ed.)

WORLD SEA PASSAGE (October to March, 1954-55).

Captain Harrison gives a day to day account of birds observed at sea from England, through the Mediterranean and Red Sea, the Indian Ocean, the Great Australian Bight, and East Coast of Australia, the South Pacific and so to Panama, the North Altantic, and home again.

One notices further confirmation of those sparsely populated ocean areas—the central sea areas of the Indian Ocean, South Pacific, and even the North Atlantic. In these areas the comments "not a bird seen all day" or "again a birdless day" begin to strike a familiar note. Elsewhere the report often paints a picture of great flocks of sea birds; passing through the Bass Strait for example Captain Harrison comments, "hundreds, probably thousands of white-faced Storm Petrels (*Pelagodroma Marina*), hundreds of thousands of short-tailed Shearwaters (*Puffinus Tenuirostris*), Mutton Birds, and many white-chinned Petrels (*Puffinus Aequinoctialis*), Cape Hens seen, the pale bills of the Cape Hens very noticeable."

A few extracts from this report must suffice. On 23rd October, in the southern end of the Red Sea one notes the occurence of slender-billed Gulls (*Larus Genei*), and the unusual spectacle of a Grey Pelican (*Pelecanus Philippensis*) in Aden Harbour. On 5th November, the first Wandering Albertross (*Diomedia Exulans*) appears in latitude 25 deg., 47 mins. south, 450 miles off Western Australia. From then on a duty section of Albatrosses or Mollymawks are in attendance daily until Sydney is reached. In Western Australia, off Rottnest Island, the ship is greeted by a good reception committee. Here a large number of Silver Gulls (*Puffinus Navoehollandiae*), Albatross, Dusky Shearwaters (*Puffinus Assimilis*), Great-winged Petrels (*Puffinus Macroptera*), a Southern Skua (*Catharacta Antartica*), Crested Terns (*Sterna Bergii*), Pintado Petrels (*Daption Capense*), and White-breasted Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax Fuscesens*) are recorded. At Perth, the only Gulls seen in harbour are the Silver Gulls, together with Cormorants. The Australian Pelican (*Pelecanus Conspicillatus*) is not seen in the harbour but is frequent in the fresh water of the Swan river.

On 24th November, in the Great Australian Bight, when up to twenty Exulans are following the ship, Captain Harrison notes that when these great birds fly past they almost invariably keep to the weather side, flying close by so that the feet can be seen to extend well beyond the tail. One or two aged birds are seen to

have pink beaks with only the tip of the upper mandible yellow, and a roseate ring around the neck.

NOTE BY EDITOR—

Dr. L. Harrison Matthews in his book " Wandering Albatross," refers to this curious colouration of the beak and feathers at the side of the head—a bright rose pink he calls it—and believes it to be a stain, and not a natural colour of the feathers. The true cause remains in doubt, but Harrison Matthews suggests it may be caused by coloured digestive juices in the young birds staining the beak and head of the parents as they disgorge a meal into the throat of the young. However, in some cases the legs and feet of old Albatrosses have been seen to be discoloured in the same way, which is hard to account for !

From Sydney the passage continued up the coast of Queensland during December and thence to New Zealand.

On 12th February, off East Cape in North Island we read " Large numbers of Southern Black-backed Gulls (*Larus Dominicus*), many Pale-footed Shearwaters (*Puffinus Carneipes*), Sooty Shearwaters (*Puffinus Griseus*), Grey-backed Shearwaters (*Puffinus Bulleri*), Wandering Albatrosses, White-faced Storm Petrels, and an Australian Gannet (*Sula Serrator*) in sight." Sailing eastward in mid latitude 36 deg. south, Albatrosses followed for the first three days. During this period Pale-footed and Grey-backed Shearwaters and Great-winged, and White-chinned Petrels are seen regularly. On 24th February, in lat. 36 deg. south, long. 165 deg. West a Cook's Petrel (*Pterodroma Cooki*) landed on board. It was very tame and perched on hands or head. Some excellent photographs were taken, and full measurements obtained. Later, several more are seen. On 2nd March, close off Ducie Island in lat. 25½ deg. south, long. 126½ deg. west, a Herald Petrel (*Pterodroma Heraldica*) is identified. For the next five or six days across the central belt of the South Pacific no birds are seen at all, and the appearance of Swallow-tailed Gulls (*Creagus Furcatus*), and White-bellied Storm Petrels (*Fregatta Grallaria*), heralds the approach to the Galapagos Islands. In mid March, during the passage of the North Atlantic from the West Indies a few Great Shearwaters (*Puffinus Gravis*) are seen, but from lat. 17 deg. north, long. 65 deg. West to lat. 34 deg. North, long. 45 deg. West, no birds are seen, until finally the first Kittywakes appear, soon to be followed by the lesser Black-backs, Herring Gulls and the like. So the long passage ends, and Captain Harrison remarks " Every bird seen has been noted, and a careful watch kept for them."

PERSIAN GULF TO RANGOON (February and March) AND RETURN VIA HOOGHLY RIVER.

Commander G. S. Willis, R.N.R., notes 53 separate observations. If one is crossing the Arabian Sea on this route, Blue-faced Boobies

(*Sula Dactylatra*), and Red-billed Tropic Birds (*Phaethon Aethereus*), are likely to be seen frequently, and were reported daily in this report. Close to the land off the southern tip of India and Ceylon, Cdr. Willis reports Indian Black-headed Gulls (*Larus Brunnicephalus*) plentiful.

No sea birds were noted in the Bay of Bengal, but in the approaches to Rangoon flocks of Indian Black-headed Gulls were seen, and Great Black-headed Gulls (*Larus Ichthyaetus*) identified. The banks in the Rangoon river provided a resting and feeding ground for flocks of Waders, whilst here and there Little Egrets, Herons and Kingfishers were noted.

The passage continued to the Hooghly river, and Lesser Black-backed Gulls (*Larus Fuscus*) and Northern Black-headed Gulls (*Larus Ridibundus*) were seen as well as the Indian and Great Black-headed Gulls.

Here, on the 1st March, about half the Northern Black-headed Gulls were already in full breeding plumage, whilst no Indian Black-headed Gulls had assumed their black hoods. The larger size of the Indian Black-heads was noticeable. Back at the Gulf of Oman on the return passage, on 12th March, Cdr. Willis, comments as follows upon a flock of over a hundred Red-necked Phalaropes (*Lobipes Lobatus*), " When taking flight these birds spring lightly into the air, almost vertically it would seem. They feed with rapid jerks and pecks, often swivel on the same spot many times and then continue feeding. The striped back, white striped wings, slender neck and pointed bill are very noticeable points.

PERSIAN GULF TO U.K. (March and April).

This Spring passage report sent in by Lt.-Cdr. Willis includes many references to land birds amongst the 100 observations recorded. At this time of year a sprinkling of Lesser Black-backed Gulls and Northern Black-headed Gulls are recorded in the Persian Gulf, and indeed all the way down the coast to Aden.

On 17th March, in the Gulf of Hormuz, large flocks of Persian Shearwaters (*Puffinus Persicus*), 200 plus, and equally large flocks of Terns, thought to be White-cheeked Terns (*Sterna Repressa*), are seen feeding together. As usual, flocks of Red-necked Phalaropes, up to 80 plus, are seen in the Gulf of Oman, and one Pomarine Skua (*Stercorarius Pomarinus*). These Skuas occur in the Arabian Sea in winter months. Blue-faced Boobies are plentiful off the Kuria Muria Islands, and Wedge-tailed Shearwaters seen daily between Masira Island and Aden. By way of a change three Herons (*Ardea Cinerea*) passed the ship off Masira, and a Hoopoe flew aboard.

This report confirms a previous report by Cdr. C. E. Hamond, R.N., of a concentration of Lesser Black-backed Gulls moving up the Red Sea and Suez Canal area in early April. In this case

large numbers are reported at Suez on 28th March, indicating a definite northern migration along the Red Sea, Suez Canal route. Here too, Cdr. Willis remarks " A flight of over 100 Pelicans passed over us in Suez Bay, white birds with black plumage, probably Eastern White-Pelicans (*Pelecanus Onocrotalus*). These large birds sailed overhead on almost motionless wings, but now and again an individual bird would give a few leisurely flaps, thus disturbing the almost motionless line abreast formation.'

During the Mediterranean passage the ship's temporary aviary is filled with tired migrants (referred to elsewhere), and from Gibraltar to U.K. the normal pattern of sea birds is seen.

PERSIAN GULF TO RIVER PLATE AND RETURN (from November to January).

In November, 1954, M.V. " British Oak " was carrying oil from the Persian Gulf to South America. While Captain Harrison was logging the birds of the South Pacific, Cdr. Willis was birdwatching in the same latitudes of the South Atlantic. To avoid repetition, notes on the beginning of the passage from the Persian Gulf are omitted.

The route passed through the Mozambique Channel where Lesser Frigate Birds (*Fregata Ariel*), Red-footed Boobies (*Sula Piscatrix*), and Sooty Terns (*Sterna Fuscata*) were seen. A Red-footed Booby settled on board all day, a habit these birds have. An immature Wandering Albatross was identified in 21½ deg. South, and seven were in company at 35½ deg. South, off Cape Vidal. Once, West of the Cape of Good Hope, with the ship crossing the South Atlantic in lat. 36 deg. South, Albatrosses were in attendance daily. Soft-plumaged Petrels (*Pterodroma Mollis*) were seen daily, Schlegels Petrel (*Pterodroma Incerta*) frequently, but more especially on the South American side. Great Shearwaters were common (their breeding station is at Tristan da Cunha) and a few White-bellied Storm Petrels were spotted.

In the approaches to the River Plate both the Southern Black-backed and Patagonian Black-headed Gulls (*Larus Maculipennis*) were numerous.

On the return passage from Cape Agulhas to Port Elizabeth flocks of Sooty Shearwaters, a few Cape Gannets and Yellow-nosed Albatrosses were seen.

In this report the swift turns and twists in the flight of the Soft-plumaged Petrels are referred to as "almost Bat-like, after the manner of an insect chasing bird." The White-bellied Storm Petrels are seen " Floating gracefully, just above water level, feet occasionally touching as the birds fed."

NEW ZEALAND TO U.K. (from February to April).

Fourth Officer M. J. D'Oyly's report of 25 observations includes the Brown Petrel (*Adaniastir cinereus*), Cook's Petrel and the Light-mantled Sooty Albatross in the South Pacific, besides species already quoted under Captain Harrison's report.

We are glad to acknowledge this first Sea Report.

NOTES ON BIRDS OBSERVED BY CAPT. J. M. BRATTON DURING PASSENGER/PILGRIM RUNS, CHITTAGONG TO JIDDA (S.S. Rizwani, Mogul Line), 1954.

We are indebted to the Director of the Seafarer's Education Service and College of the Sea for forwarding this report. The ship seems to have been particularly favoured by bird visitors.

During passages, Blue Jays, Swallows, Nightjars, Owls, a Grey-hooded Kingfisher, a Kite, Hawks, and a large unidentified Eagle came aboard.

NORTH ATLANTIC.

Time has not permitted Capt. Colquhoun's Atlantic passage reports to be analysed and included in this report.

RANDOM REPORTS FROM THE OCEANS.

ALBATROSS IN NORTH ATLANTIC.

Since the publication of the 1954 " Sea Swallow " a further report has been received of an Albatross observed on 13th January, 1955, in position 46 deg., 28 min. North, 39 deg. West. The report comes from Captain A. J. F. Colquhoun, M.V. " Elysia " (Anchor Line), the ship being on a voyage from Baltimore to Avonmouth. The bird was at times within twenty feet of the bridge and was studied closely through binoculars. Captain Colquhoun who watched the bird with two other ship's officers, describes it as follows:—" Wing span about 6 feet. In size and behaviour, strongly resembled an Albatross in shape of head, body, wings and tail. Overall colour mottled dark brown or black, light brown and white. Mantle darker than underside of wings, which showed some white patches. The head was lighter in colour, brown and white mottled colour. Legs were yellow. Mandible was black and of the tubenose type. The bird glided backwards and forwards close to windward of the ship."

(*Note by Editor*:—this description would fit in with that of an immature Black-browed Albatross).

MIGRANTS DURING A MEDITERRANEAN PASSAGE IN EARLY APRIL.

Vast numbers of migrants are crossing the Mediterranean in the Spring, and many take the opportunity of a " stand easy " on the decks and rigging of ships. The following species all settled on board M.V. " British Oak " between 300 miles East and a similar distance West of Malta, between 5th and 8th April, 1954:—Stone Curlew, two Nightjars, two Swallows, a Hoopoe, a Turtle Dove, three Quail, a Scop's Owl, a Little Egret, three Blue-headed Wagtails and a Blackcap. A male Redstart was found dead on deck, and a Black-winged Stilt was seen.

The following birds were caught and held in the ship's aviary until the weather improved:—one adult Woodchat Shrike, four Blue-headed Wagtails, seven Swallows, one adult male Blackcap, one adult female Redstart, one Lesser Whitethroat and one Scop's Owl.

REPORTS FROM WEATHER SHIPS.

We receive many interesting reports from the " Weather Ships," and much appreciate this source of information. Most reports come from patrol positions some 300 miles N.W. of Scotland, and 250 miles S. of Iceland.

Skuas, Fulmars, Kittywakes, Shearwaters, Gulls, Terns, and Gannets are all seen regularly in this area, and numbers of sea birds congregate around the ships.

The Skuas do not always dominate the throng as these two extracts from reports show:—

Captain F. A. Elston, O.W.S. " Weather Watcher," writes:— " When one of the Great Skuas settled on the water it was charged from behind by a Fulmar and bitten on the tail. The grip was sufficiently strong to prevent the Skua from taking off ! "

Captain A. W. Ford, O.W.S. " Weather Recorder,' quotes:— " A Tern after evading the rushes of an Arctic Skua, apparently became annoyed and turned and attacked the Skua, which at once broke off the engagement."

On 15th May, 1955, a Bewick's Swan was seen resting on the sea amongst the other sea birds, the ship being 270 miles S. of Iceland.

LAND BIRDS AT SEA.

Many land birds have been reported. A few of the more interesting cases are quoted below:—

American Bittern (*Botaurus Lentiginosus*), 24th August, 1954, landed on board M.V. " Scottish Eagle," roughly 660 miles E.S.E. of Bermuda, and 840 miles N.E. of Antigua (B.W.I.). This bird breeds in North America, living in swamps, and winters south to Panama. A photograph confirmed identification. After resting awhile it flew off to the S.W. Lets hope it was in good training !

Least Bittern (*Ixobrychus Exilis*), 23rd September, 1954. Landed on board S.S. " Pinnacles ' (Deep Sea Tankers Ltd. of Toronto), 198 miles W.S.W. of Bermuda. This species is widespread in the Americas and the West Indies. Doubtless a southward migration occurs in the Autumn, and this would account for its presence at sea.

Swallows (*Hirundo Rustica*). During late September, 1954, three ships on passage in the Red Sea reported invasions of Swallows. In one case more than 100 roosted on board. In all cases the birds were very tame, many exhausted, and could be handled.

Captain F. G. Bolton of M.V. " Trevider " (Hain Steamship Coy.), remarks:—" 28th September, at 04.00 hrs. Several Swallows fall off perches and die. More die during course of the day. Remainder leave ship on arrival at Aden."

Grey Hooded Kingfisher (*Halcyon Pallidiventris*). The bird came aboard the Passenger/Pilgrim ship " Rozwani " (Mogul Line) off Perim Island, Red Sea, on 11th October, 1954. The bird is a native of South Africa, but clearly wanders further north, for this is the second confirmed report from the Red Sea.

Bats at Sea ? Identification at night must be so much open to doubt that a bird may appear as a bat and vice versa. The following two reports are none the less welcome:—

" Lat. 11 deg. South, Long. 74 deg. East. Nearest land, Diego Garcia, 250 miles to N.N.W. In bright moonlight two bats flying

in jerky movements in and out of foremast rigging, continually uttering characteristic high pitched squeal of the bat.

Silhouettes showed up clearly. Estimated wing span 20 ins." (*Editor*:—Big Bats).

" Lat. 25 deg. South, long. 10 deg. East to the Equator, and long. 10 deg. West. At sea, well off West coast of Africa. On numerous voyages a pair of birds has been observed circling the ship at night, but they have not been seen in daylight hours. These birds have a bat-like flight. Whilst circling the ship the birds appear luminous and continue calling."

(*Note by Editor*:— Some sea birds, which do not customarily fly to ships by day, are undoubtedly attracted by ship's lights. Only recently, a member of R.N.B.W.S. remarked that he was interested in the luminous effect of a species of Tern that was circling his ship at night, to discover, on stepping clear of the bridge awning, that the effect was caused when the birds entered the beam of the fore steaming light.

KNOT (*Calidris Canutus*). On 26th August, 1955, a Knot in winter plumage, landed on board M.V. " Elysia," in position 44 deg. North, 45 deg. West, and remained on board for two days while the ship was steaming 070 deg., at 15 nots. The bird was very tame, was closely examined, and spent two days on board. The observer was surprised that the bird was already in winter plumage. By mid August the southward migration of these birds from their Arctic breeding grounds is in full swing. Adults at this stage are generally in a very faded form of red plumage, following a partial moult after the breeding season, but have not normally assumed their full winter plumage. Juveniles usually have traces of warm buff on the scapulaes and tertials, and on the breast.

NOTES FROM HOME

SOUND OF HARRIS AND THE MINCHES.

A great variety of sea birds, Ducks, Divers, Waders and shore birds breed and pass through the Outer Hebrides. Lieutenant D. H. C. Lowis, R.N. and Chief Shipwright A. S. Finemore have forwarded an extensive list of the bird life noted during the period H.M.S. " Cook " was surveying in the area from May to July, 1954.

GULLS. Herring and Lesser Black-backed Gulls predominated, nesting, as were the Great Black-backs on most of the islands in the Sound. A colony of Common Gulls was nesting at Loch Langevat, two miles inland. Black-headed Gulls and Kittiwakes were seen, but rarely came into the Sound proper. Two Little Gulls (*Larus Minutus*) were seen at the approaches to Loch Ewe, and another off the Shiant Islands on 19th May.

TERNS. Common Terns were abundant, six colonies located nesting on the islands. Little Terns were seen here and there.

PETRELS, SHEARWATERS. A colony of Fulmars with 80 nests was observed on the high cliffs at Toe Head, and there were several small colonies on Pabbay Island. Many Shearwaters occasionally came into the southern part of the Sound.

AUKS. Common and Black Guillemots were most plentiful, Razorbills seen regularly, but Puffins only seen occasionally.

GANNETS were widespread over the whole area (St. Kilda is but 60 miles to the west).

SHAGS. Where the cliffs were steep on the north facing coasts, colonies of Shags were nesting.

DUCK. Eider Ducks were common, nesting on the islands. Shell Duck, Mallard, Pochard and Golden Eye were also seen, and a few Red- breasted Mergansers.

DIVERS. Black-throated Divers were seen almost every day, flighting up the line of Lochs behind Leverburgh in the evenings.

WADERS. Oystercatchers were here, there, and everywhere, often nesting among the Common Terns. Common Sandpipers were plentiful, and one Purple Sandpiper was seen. Lapwings were nesting on grassy islands, but avoided the boggy, heathery islands, and Ringed Plover were nesting on Pabbay and elsewhere. Common Snipe were seen everywhere. On 1st May, flocks of Golden Plover and Turnstones were seen, probably on passage. Curlew and Whimbrel were noted.

SHORE BIRDS. On Harris, the commonest bird in evidence was the Hoodie. A few Ravens were about in May and one pair of Buzzards was nesting near Leverburgh. Wheatears were nesting in large numbers. The list includes Stone Chats, Rock Pippits, Larks, Wrens, Starlings, Cuckoos, Rock Doves, Twites, etc.

HERONS were seen in ones and twos on the many small islands in the Sound. There were no trees, but they may have resorted to nesting on the ground. No nests were found.

(*Note by Editor*:—The above notes by no means cover the whole of the report).

INVERNESSHIRE—SNOW BUNTINGS AT MOY.

During the very severe weather in March, 1955, Vice-Admiral The Mackintosh of Mackintosh reported large numbers of Snow Buntings at Moy. Two or three flocks were seen, a hundred birds or more in each flock.

SUSSEX—WHITE WINGED COCK CHAFFINCH.

On 19th June, 1955, at Bury, Captain Tuck, R.N. reports his astonishment at seeing at close quarters a White-winged cock Chaffinch. Instead of the normal white outer wing bar, the primaries of both wings were completely white. As the bird flitted from the ground to the lower branches of an elm tree, and thence from branch to branch, its outspread white wings made a spectacular picture.

FORFAR—PUFFINS NEAR AUCHMITHIE.

Commander V. C. Grenfell, R.N. and his wife write:—"We came upon a small colony on the cliffs at Auchmithie, a small fishing hamlet about 3 miles north of Arbroath, and watched them daily from 1st to 12th June. Their nests were all inside deep horizontal cracks in the cliff face, mostly about 50 feet from ground level. One crevice was only 15 feet up from the cliff base and was inhabited by a very inquisitive Puffin, who invariably peered out when she heard us passing, giving us a very wise and parrot-like stare before disappearing into her hole to attend to her egg.

On fine days the Puffins floated in parties of a dozen or more, just off the rocks, and would make occasional busy flights to the cliffs and back. They circled us like small "Doodle-bugs," coming closer with every circuit, until deciding we were harmless, they returned to their holes or to their feeding. On dull days, and at low tide, they sat on the ledges outside their burrows watching the world go by. They ignored all efforts on our part to make

them fly, and merely sat staring at us like a lot of little red-nosed old men in tail coats !

On the same cliffs were innumerable Gull's nests, including many Fulmars.

WARWICKSHIRE—GREAT CRESTED GREBES ON EARLSWOOD LAKES.

The three Earlswood Lakes lie abot 10 miles south of Birmingham, and provide a breeding area for numbers of Great-crested Grebes. Lt.-Commander Thomas Ferrand, R.N. had the Grebes under observation from the end of May, 1954, to the end of November.

On 22nd May, ten adult birds were seen, and a week later, fourteen adults were counted and three nests located with eggs and young.

On 25th July, females were also sitting on nests, while several fully grown young were following their parents. As late as 29th August, one bird was still incubating eggs. By 17th November all the Great-crested Grebes appeared to have left the lakes, and only the innumerable Coots, Moorhens, and occasionally Mallard and Tufted Duck were observed up to January, 1955.

SUSSEX—BEE-EATERS.

The appearance and successful breeding of two pairs of these beautiful and uncommon birds in a sand pit in Sussex this year, has occasioned widespread interest.

KENT—NIGHT HERON.

Dr. J. M. Harrison and Surgeon Lieutenant J. G. Harrison, R.N.V.R., had the good fortune to locate and subsequently film a young Night Heron, on a big lake in Kent, in early September this year.

NOTES FROM ABROAD

(Most notes received have come in the form of Sea Reports).

TARHUNA, LIBYA.

Lieutenant P. J. S. Smith, Royal Marines, while training in the desert with the Royal Marine Commandos in 1953, listed a large number of Spring migrants passing through the area. The results of his observations have been included in K. M. Guichard's paper on the birds of Fezzan and Tibesti (*Ibis* 97-3-1955).

TOBAGO, BRITISH WEST INDIES. LAUGHING GULLS.

Commander C. E. Hamond, R.N., who has been adding to his collection of water colours of birds of Trinidad and Tobago during the winter 1954-55, sends this note on the arrival and behaviour of the Laughing Gulls (*Larus atricilla*).

" In my notes on Tobago birds I have mentioned the lack of Gulls, but hitherto I had left the island by early March and before the Laughing Gulls had arrived. This year we saw them arrive early in March, and indeed the whole process of achieving their black caps within about a fortnight. In Cousland Bay they sat on the sea in flocks of two or three hundred, densely packed together, all the while screaming and laughing. When the Brown Pelicans are feeding on " Jack," each bird is accompanied by one or more of the Gulls. As the Pelican surfaces after its dive a gull frequently perches on its back, or more often its head, to stand by for any trifles which may escape as the Pelican strains the water out of its pouch."

H.M.S. " LOCH LOMOND," PERSIAN GULF—CLEANING OILED BIRDS.

An interesting aspect of a report on bird life in the Persian Gulf, forwarded by Ordinary Telegraphist G. E. Miles, is the successful work he has been doing in saving the life of birds brought to him contaminated with oil. He has already had success with six or seven cases, and quotes one case of a Sanderling " covered from head to tail in oil." After completely cleaning it, including careful swabbing out of the ears, which were overflowing "with oil," the bird was placed in the Emergency Wireless Office to dry off, and ater flew off without any trouble.

EXTRACTS FROM A MEMBER'S DIARY

(From the Diary of Lt.-Cdr. A. K. Hall, R.N.).

(*Note by Editor*:—The highly systematic and scientific ornithology of our times, truly important as it is, tends to translate the life story of our birds into graphs and diagrams, reminding the sea voyager of the New York silhouette at nightfall. The lasting joy of bird watching, as this diary surely shows, is derived chiefly from the unforgettable glimpses of birds in unexpected places, and of the countryside surrounding them).

H.M.S. " Ariel,"
Winchester.

Friday, 14th January, 1955. After a heavy fall of snow on the previous day, Blackbirds, Thrushes, Chaffinches, House Sparrows, Starlings, Rooks, Pied Wagtails, Skylarks, and Black-headed Gulls were seen in the back garden of our new Married Quarter, feeding on scraps and bread.

Sunday, 23rd January. The hedgerows and bushes around the Worthy Down Racecourse were full of bird life, Great and Blue Tits, Yellow Hammers, Linnets, Hedge Accenters, Green Finches and Missel Thrushes. The Peewits which had vanished from the airfield during the very cold weather were back in force.

Saturday, 29th January. Quite a chorus of bird song at 07.25, Thrushes and at least one Skylark. Saw the largest flock of Wood Pigeons I have ever seen during the afternoon. Came across a Barn Owl feeding on rabbit remains in full daylight.

Tuesday, 15th February. Pairs of Partridges seen in various parts of the airfield and their grating calls heard at dawn and dusk.

Saturday, 19th February. The Black-headed Gulls are slowly getting their chocolate coloured heads back.

Monday, 28th February. Yellow Hammers in full song at 07.55, despite the terrible frost and cold. Noticed that the cock Chaffinche's plumage is getting brighter. Meadow Pippit feeding on the rough ground in front of the Married Quarters.

Saturday, 12th March. The farmer busy sowing corn on the ploughed up airfield, accompanied by hosts of birds; Peewits, Rooks, Missel Thrushes, Song Thrushes, Blackbirds, Herring and Black-headed Gulls, Pied Wagtails, Skylarks, Sparrows, Tits, Finches and Field Fares.

Thursday, 17th March. The bird, with a most monotonous song, which has been singing from the top of a bush in the lower field for the past two days, identified as a Corn Bunting.

Saturday, 26th March. Our first migrants ! While sat listening to the radio commentary on the Boat Race, I spotted two Wheatears

on the ploughed land behind the house. The Boat Race was forgotten in the rush for the binoculars. These Wheatears remained in the locality for five days.

Sunday, 3rd April to Sunday, 17th April was spent on leave in Shropshire and Caernarvonshire.

On Ellesmere, in Shropshire, we saw at least two pairs of Great Crested Grebes, hundreds of Coots, numerous ducks, including Goldeneyes, Widgeon, Mallard and Tufted, a few Cormorants, a Heron and a flock of Canada Geese. In that area we heard and saw our first Warbler, the Chiff Chaff, and found our first nest, a Blackbird's.

On the hills behind Bangor, in Caernarvonshire, we watched Ravens rolling in the wind, Long-tailed Tits and Linnets feeding among the heather, and listened to the lovely cry of the Curlews as they flew along the hillside. On Wednesday, 13th April, at 16.30 near a village called Brynkir, we saw our first Swallows of the year. Spring here at last !

On the following day Warblers were everywhere, feeding along the streams, and they sang continually.

Saturday, 23rd April. On Stockbridge Down, the Cuckoo was seen and heard for the first time this year.

Thursday, 28th April. Linnets' and Yellow Hammers' nests found, both with eggs in. Goldfinches seen in the Wardroom gardens. A Cuckoo has been calling all day from the bushes and trees in the Racecourse. A Whitethroat on the pea sticks in the back garden at 16.45.

Saturday, 30th April. Heard and tracked down to its singing position ,a Nightingale. It sang until far into the night.

Monday, 2nd May. A single Wheatear seen on the roof of the Changing Rooms, near the main gate. A cock Pheasant and his half a dozen hens have taken up residence along the hedge bottoms in the lower field.

Wednesday, 4th May. During a walk over Worthy Down and through the woods bordering it, we saw a Green Woodpecker, Nuthatch, numerous Warblers, Great Tits and Blue Tits, twenty odd Peewits, a pair of Bullfinches and our first Turtle Doves of the season.

Thursday, 5th May. The House Martins arrived back. During the winter their nests under the eaves of the N.A.A.F.I. building were destroyed by the painters, and the birds commenced building immediately on arrival. A Mistle Thrush has built her nest in a tree near the Gymnasium, the tree is not very tall and the passage of large bodies of men up and down the road does not appear to worry her a bit.

Saturday, 7th May. The Swifts are here again.

Sunday, 15th May. Three Linnets' nests, containing three, four and five eggs respectively and a Hedge Accenters' with three eggs, found amid bushes on the lower field.

Wednesday, 25th May. The Corn Bunting is still haunting the same spot, and despite extensive hunting, his nest remains hidden. Watched a Skylark singing from the ground. The House Martins have completed their mud nest and the Mistle Thrush has hatched.

Tuesday, 31st May. During a visit to the river Itchen, at Itchen Abbas, four miles from H.M.S. "Ariel," we were able to identify and recognise Reed Buntings and Sedge Warblers. We saw a pair of Mute Swans with seven Cygnets, a Coot and a Moorhen family, a group of Magpies and a Barn Owl.

Saturday, 18th June. Saw a Black-headed Gull over the airfield, the first for a long time. Watched Yellow Wagtails, (our first ever), Swallows, Pied Wagtails, Spotted Flycatchers and House Sparrows, Hawking Flies and Moths over the river Test at Fullerton.

Monday, 20th June. The last record I have this year of the call of a Cuckoo.

Thursday, 23rd June. A Kestrel sitting on top of a Hawthorn bush near the Worthy Down Railway Station was " under fire " from a cock Blackbird. The noise the Blackbird was making had to be heard to be believed.

SPRINGTIME ORNITHOLOGY IN ORKNEY

By Surgeon Lieutenant Jeffrey G. Harrison, R.N.V.R.

The ornithologist in search of northern birds can do far worse than begin his studies with a visit to the Orkneys, and this was why we made our way there in the latter half of May and early June, 1955. Our excitements on this trip start in Scrabster Harbour, if crossing the Pentland Firth in a N.W. gale counts for anything. There was a young Iceland Gull or should I say Greenland Herring Gull ?—in harbour, on the late date of May 18th, and as we watched it, we could hear a Ring Ousel singing from the hill behind the quay. We were followed across by Fulmars, gliding into the gale with effortless ease. It was interesting to watch these Fulmars riding the great waves, facing the wind and opening their wings on the crest of a comber to become airborne by the simple expedient of allowing the waves to drop away beneath them. Later the nesting Greater Black-backed Gulls and a Great Skua from Hoy joined the throng, as we steamed past immense flocks of Puffins from their colony near St. John's Head. Shags, Black Guillemots–and Eider Duck were sheltering in Stromness Harbour, when we finally came alongside after a really rough four hour crossing.

Although it is no part of this article, a visit to Stromness Museum is most worthwhile, for there is a fine display of Orkney's famous prehistoric remains, the marine fauna, mammals and birds. Here we saw many Orkney rarities, all beautifully preserved, including the American Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Ivory Gull, Glossy Ibis, Greenland Redpoll and King Eider—the latter a young drake unfortunately, and not a full plumaged bird, such as my father saw in Scapa Bay, on January 27th, 1919, while duck shooting with some shipmates from H.M.S. " Canning."

That evening, as we drove across the Churchill Barriers to Barray, recovered from our crossing, our first impressions of Orkney were good. Eiders in pairs and flocks were swimming offshore, Mergansers with them, feeding as they swam, with their heads only half submerged and a Black-throated Diver in glorious spring plumage floated asleep, so that we had to sound the horn to be sure of its identity. The drake Eiders showed up from afar, as their black bellies and white backs obliterated the more usual camouflage effect of counter-shading.

The Orkneys present such a paradise for birds that one cannot begin to describe even the little we saw in a short article. We tramped many miles across the moors to see precisely three Grouse, finding many nesting Common Gulls, a few Curlew and Golden Plover, but to be rewarded finally by the sight of breeding Red-throated Divers, a pair of Hen Harriers and towards the end by finding many Eiders' nests, the ducks (unlike the drakes) being

perfectly camouflaged in the heather. We were rather pleased at locating the Divers. We had been told that " Loon " is often worked into the name of the hill-lochs where they must have nested for generations, and on searching the map we chose " Loomva Water " for our first attempt, and there they were.

But it is a regrettable fact that no nest is safe on the moors from the attentions of the big Gulls—so often the Black-backed Gulls were nesting close by. The menace of vermin Gulls is impossible to exaggerate; everywhere we found robbed nests and broken eggs, and if the bird life of Orkney is to be preserved, they will soon have to be controlled, and a watch kept on the Bonxies, in case they spread too widely, as they are now doing in the Shetlands, to the detriment of smaller birds, particularly Terns.

The farmland, bogs and lochs were full of interest. The Twite, which I had always thought of as a moorland species, was on the contrary to be found around the crofts, and every field appeared to have a Corncrake. The smallest pond had a brood of ducklings, be they Mallard, Shoveler or Teal. The severe hail storms of mid-May took their toll and one young Shoveler found dead had the marks of three separate hail stones in bruises on the skull. Widgeon were absent, except for one drake found dying from tuberculosis—an extremely rare disease in wildfowl. Tufted Duck and Pochard nested on the lochs and on Loch Skaill on May 20th we saw the rearguard of the winter visitors—Goldeneye and a party of Long-tailed Duck in summer plumage. Many hundred Kittywakes were coming daily to bathe in the fresh water of this and other lochs—a widespread habit in Orkney among the large flocks of, presumably, non-breeding Kittywakes.

By the lochsides Dunlin, Golden Plover, Oystercatchers and Snipe were nesting, while the sight of a Lapwing diving at an intruder Gull as it flew over its young, was perhaps the most characteristic sight at that time of year. We were reminded that Britain is still wild in places, and one scene resembled more Middle-East than a British bird watching occasion—it was the spectacle of twelve Hooded Crows feeding on the carcase of a sheep whose whitened ribs pointed to the skies, and as we watched, Ravens came tumbling out of the skies.

To study the cliff-nesting birds ideally needs a boat, which is easily obtained, and we were able to spend many happy hours among them. Fulmars were everywhere, nesting even just above sea level on the grass holms. We only saw one example of the rare " blue " variety, which appeared to be nesting at Deerness on the Mainland. Shags, Guillemots, Razorbills, Herring Gulls and Kittywakes, each in colonies, occupied their own particular type of ledge. Puffins were the most selective and localised, and the Black Guillemot was the most widespread of the Auks, if less numerous of the others. We found their nests in rocks crevices and in Rabbit burrows on the grass holms. Cliff-nesters are

opportunists, as the nest of a Herring Gull showed—it was made of granite chippings, while a pair of Rock Doves were nesting in the rusty funnel of one of the block ships and Starlings were using holes in the ground. Other cliff-nesting species included Herons, forced to do this by the scarcity of trees, Wrens and Rock Pipits, whose ecological niche meets that of the Meadow Pipit only about fifty yards inland from the cliff top.

Hundreds of Rock Doves, with young already strong in the wing, were raiding the newly-sown crops and provided us with some fine shooting. It would be interesting to know the total Rock Dove population of Orkney. We estimated there must have been 5,000 on South Ronaldsay alone, and the damage these birds do is immense. We found they were particularly easy to decoy, using the birds we shot as decoys. They are far easier to lure than Wood Pigeons and we thought the reson for this was the white rump, which showed up so plainly to those flighting past.

The grass holms with their nesting Cormorants must be visited. No one can enthuse about the smell of stale, half-eaten codling which litter their nests, but the sight of several hundred Cormorants taking off is a fine one, and we found the holms were full of Eiders, Terns, Fulmars, Black Guillemots and the inevitable big Gulls, so that it was hard to to avoid treading on eggs, while our trip usually provided views of Great Northern Divers (once a flock of fifteen), Gannets or Velvet Scoters while at sea.

In two respects only the Orkneys rather failed us, for we never found a Red-necked Phalarope and we saw very little migration; this in spite of some nice anticyclonic weather at the end of May, which brought the first British occurence of the Hudsonian Curlew to Fair Isle. At least it brought us a small " rush " of Wheatears, a Pied Flycatcher and a fine Barred Warbler, which we saw on Hoy, skulking in some bushes, when we had crossed to look for the Bonxies and Arctic Skuas.

One of the objects of our stay was to study the structure of the skulls of diving birds, such as Cormorants, Auks and sea duck. They were found to be almost entirely airless, which is quite unlike the structure in most birds. While research into this is still in progress, it is thought that this may be an adaptation to eliminate unpleasant symptoms when diving, due to pressure changes in the intercranial air cells, as we experience when flying and suffering from a bad head cold.

Our visit ended all too soon, leaving me wondering if a posting to Lyness was really quite so terrible as I'd heard. Somehow I think not, but tastes undoubtedly differ !

LITTLE SHEARWATERS "DUETTING" OUTSIDE THEIR BURROW

Photograph by John Warham, M.B.O.U.

THE NESTING OF THE LITTLE SHEARWATER

By John Warham, M.B.O.U.

The Little Shearwater (*Puffinus assimilis*) has a world range which includes the Atlantic, Indian and Pacific Oceans, and many forms have been described. The Madeiran race (*P. a. baroli*) occasionally turns up in British waters, and a Little Shearwater, doubtless of this race, was seen offshore at Aberdaron, Caernavonshire in 1951.

These notes are based on observations made on the breeding grounds of the Western Australian race, (*P. a. tunneyi*), during stays on Eclipse Island, a lighthouse station off Albany and the last landfall for shipping passing across the Australian Bight *en route* for Melbourne and Sydney. My wife and I visited the island from 2nd to 24th July and 9th to 24th September, 1954.

In these latitudes Little Shearwaters are winter nesters and egg-laying begins at the end of June. Incubation and rearing of young often takes place in very stormy weather and during our stay on the island winds of gale force and heavy rain were frequent.

We did not find the Little Shearwater a noisy bird, though the lighthouse keepers state that in early January, when they begin to return, the noise is deafening, particularly on dark and stormy nights. During our first stay on the island when most of the birds were incubating, we never heard an incoming bird call on the wing. During the second period a little calling was heard on three nights only, but the chorus was very subdued in comparison with the cacophony usual among Shearwater colonies—on Skomer and Skokholm, for instance, where the Manx Shearwater breeds in considerable numbers.

Little Shearwaters nest either in burrows scraped from between the rocks or dug from the soil. Some of the nest chambers are only a few feet down, and by getting one's head close to the entrance the sitting birds may be seen with the aid of a torch. Others are quite inaccessible, the way to the chamber being via a devious tunnel which has been worked around projecting rocks and stones. The nest itself is sparsely lined with grasses, dry pigface stems and the like.

When preparing to incubate, the Little Shearwater adopts the contortions characteristic of its tribe at such times—it straddles the egg and pushes it to the rear of its body with the beak, at the same time holding its drooping wings slightly away from its sides. One bird in an unusually open site gave a momentary threat display when I moved a stone from the front and reached inside to feel the egg. The bird backed away, jabbing its beak at my hand and raised its half-opened wings on either side of its body.

At night the incoming birds are often able to alight within a few feet of their burrows, sometimes right at the entrance. Some crash into the bushes and subsequently work their way to their nests. Moonlight does not prevent the birds from coming in and

their white underparts show up for a moment as they flash by. High-flying birds sweeping through the lighthouse beam look like meteors in a November sky. Little Shearwaters come in at quite high speeds, then flutter their wings through a small amplitude and finally stall and drop to earth. Taking off seldom gives much trouble for most nests are on sloping ground and even on calm nights they can soon bounce their way into the air.

In describing the voice of the Madeiran race, Lockley finds it just like a high-pitched version of the Manx Shearwater (*Puffinus puffinus*). This is certainly not true of the Eclipse Island birds which have voices quite different in timbre and rhythm from the Manx Shearwaters of the West Wales islands. All the *assimilis* calls heard by the present writer could be described as hoarse, asthmatical croonings, based on the phrase: "*wah*, i-wah-i-wah-ooo" with the emphasis on the first syllable. The phrase is repeated two or three times and ends in an incoherent splutter. The "wah's" are apparently uttered as the breath is expelled, the rest of the call on the intake. This "song" is used both by flying birds and by those on the ground. It is also the basis of the crooning duets that take place during the changover at the nest.

In order to study the birds inside their nests a method which I formerly used on the Shearwaters of Skomer Island was resorted to. In the absence of the parents the roof of the chamber was removed and a false roof fitted. Later a hide was rigged up on top, but well clear of the entrance; at dusk the false roof could be removed and the behaviour of the occupants studied with the aid of a red light placed three feet away. High-speed photography was used to record the incidents observed.

The sequence of events on most nights was much the same. On my arrival the chick would generally be sleepng, and as I found with *P. puffinus*, the young one also reaches out and collects any small grasses, feathers and so on and tucks these in around it. The parent bird would arrive shortly after dark, the "plop" of an alighting bird nearby being often audible on quiet nights. The nestling would begin to chitter expectantly as the parent entered the nest and feeding began immediately and lasted for 15 to 20 minutes. Feeding takes place in four stages:—

1. The cheeping chick drives its beak in the general direction of the bird's head.
2. Parent and chick fence with their beaks, chick still calling vigorously.
3. Beaks interlock and remain crossed as food is transferred. Chick is silent but beats its tiny wings. Beaks remain in contact for about five seconds. The old bird's bill is opened wide and that of the chick crosses more or less at right angles.
4. Chick withdraws bill, swallows, and is silent. A slight pause follows and the cycle is repeated.

Feeding was never seen later in the night but only immediately after the adult's arrival; after this the chick went to sleep and the parent, if unaccompanied by its mate did the same. A tour of occupied sites around 10.30 p.m. would reveal most adults resting or sleeping and they may even be there in the early hours of the morning.

The peculiar manner in which the young Shearwater drives its beak at the head of the parent before contact is made, is doubtless an adaptation to the circumstances that normally the inside of the cavity is in darkness. The birds have, therefore, to rely upon their sence of touch and possibly of smell. In the species I have studied the parents can be very clumsy at times when within the nest and they often tread on the chick when they are trying to brood it.

When watching Shearwaters, especially at or before the egg-stage, one is tempted to suspect that sense of smell may be used in guiding incoming birds to their nests and mates. Burrows and occupiers have a peculiar odour and it is well known that the nasal glands are unusually large in Shearwaters and Albatrosses, but no proof of the birds' possession of a sense of smell seems to have been established.

PROTECTION OF BIRDS ACT, 1954

Summarised by Lt.-Cdr. E. S. W. Maclure, R.N.

This Act, which was introduced as a Private Member's Bill by Lady Tweedsmuir in the House of Commons and later to the House of Lords by Viscount Templewood, in its finalised form received the Royal assent on 4th June, 1954, and became law as from 1st December, 1954.

As perhaps there are many who have not had the opportunity to study the terms of the new Act in full, it is therefore opportune to review, without going into great detail, the main essentials comprising the Act and the contribution it has made towards the improved protection of the wild birds of the British Isles.

The Act itself is contained in a twenty page booklet published by H.M. Stationery Office, price 9d., entitled "Protection of Birds Act, 1954." It contains sixteen clauses and six schedules and has repealed twenty-six Acts of Parliament (one dating back to George III) and over 250 local County orders. The Royal Society for Protection of Birds has also produced a very concise leaflet which helps to explain the terms of the Act in simplified non-Parliamentary language.

The basic principle of the Act is to afford comprehensive protection for all wild birds native to the British Isles, including their nests and eggs, subject to certain scheduled exceptions. It does not apply to birds that come under the Game Acts such as Grouse, Pheasant, Partridge, Black Game or Ptarmigan, but it does cover such quasi-game birds as Duck, Geese, Snipe, Woodcock, Capercailzie, Plover, Curlew in as much as it affords to these protection only during the respective close seasons laid down. The Act also makes provision for much heavier penalties than those existing in the past, and with this behind it, it is to be hoped that a conviction, with the possibility of a large fine and imprisonment, may now prove a deterrent to those who show cruelty to birds, the hardened bird-catcher, inveterate egg collector and the like.

The first clause of the Act lays down the guiding principles that, with certain exceptions any wild bird, its nest and its eggs are protected. This clause contains two schedules, Schedule I lists some fifty-nine species of our rarer birds which it is hoped to encourage to breed in Britain, and these are given special protection. If these birds or their eggs are molested, the fine is £25 and/or up to three months imprisonment. Schedule II of Clause One of the Act gives special protection to certain other birds, mostly the rarer wildfowl, but only during the close season.

The Second Clause of the Act lists twenty birds which may be killed or taken at any time by authorised persons, i.e., an owner or tenant of land or person named by him and certain persons authorised in writing by local authorities or such public bodies as the Nature Conservancy. These bird are generally recognised as

harmful either to agriculture (Hooded and Carrion Crow, Wood Pigeon), to city buildings (Starlings), to other birds (Jay, Magpie), or to fisheries (Red-breasted Merganser, Cormorant, Shag). The Third Schedule to this clause lists also some twenty-three species of game birds or quasi-game birds which may be killed or taken only outside the close season. Apart from the harmful and sporting birds, any offence against all other wild birds brings the penalty of the Act—a £5 fine.

It is not intended to enumerate here in detail all the remaining clauses of the Act, but they cover a number of other important matters. Firstly the Act gives wide powers to the Secretary of State and he is empowered by order to legalise the taking of eggs of a number of the commoner species. This has been done in an attempmt to overcome the problem of young children who birdnest and collect a few eggs, and who otherwise would become technical criminals under the terms of the new Act. This matter is a highly controversial subject especially as the list of birds which the Home Secretary has recently decided to promulgate under the provisions of this clause comprise a number of well-loved favourites and songsters.

The full list comprises Blackbird, Chaffinch, Coot, Greenfinch, Black-headed Gull, Hedge Sparrow, Linnet, Moorhen, Robin, Skylark, Mistle Thrush, Song Thrush, Wren in England and Wales with the addition to these of the Common Gull, Oyster Catcher, Meadow Pipit, Redshank, Pied Wagtail, Willow Warbler and Yellow Hammer in Scotland.

The wisest school of thought in dealing with this problem seems not inadequately summed up in the following extract taken from Volume LI No. 2, Summer, 1955 of the " Countryman ":—

> " A correspondent recently met three boys out bird-nesting. One had an egg collection of his own and kept another for his friend, whose parents would not allow him to take the eggs home. The third did not collect because he was a Wolf Cub and the Scout Laws forbid it, but he went along to find nests for the others. The first had a Crow's egg, which he said he had bought from another boy. Asked whether they knew which bird's eggs they were allowed to take, they hastily said " Crow," but could name no other."

So much for the Home Secretary's list of birds whose eggs may be taken with impunity. It is a great pity that he did not make all egg taking illegal and leave the administration of the Law to the good sense of the police and magistrates.

Certain gulls' eggs can be taken for food and Lapwings' eggs up to April 15th.

The Secretary of State is given powers under the Act to remove or add birds to certain schedules in part or throughout the country, also to grant licences for special purposes such as the taking of Hawks for falconry, certain scientific or educational reasons, etc.

He can also vary the dates of the close seasons by order, but he cannot shorten them.

There is a clause giving power to create bird sanctuaries, and another to cover the welfare of those birds permitted to be kept in captivity.

The interests of Farmers and Gardeners are safeguarded by provisions which justify the destruction of any wild bird where the applicant can satify the Court that such action was necessary for the purpose of preventing serious damage to crops, vegetables, fruit, growing timber or fisheries.

The sale of most native live birds while alive (unless close ringed and bred in captivity) is illegal as is the sale of wild birds' eggs including blown eggs and plumage. This applies also to barter or exchange which will be construed as sale for the purpose of this clause of the Act.

In this conection it is of interest to note that the first case under the new Act was brought against a Cheshire dealer in birds' eggs in July, 1955, by the R.S.P.B. Though the magistrates were critical in regard to the framing of the new Act, nevertheless the dealer was fined £5 on one summons of selling and £25 each on two summonses of offering eggs for sale. He was found not guilty on two summonses of possessing eggs, but ordered to pay £50 towards the costs.

There are restrictions on the import of certain wild birds and eggs.

Stringent regulations are also laid down to prevent the capture or killing of wild birds by methods such as bird lime, drugs, snares, poison bait, etc., except under special licence.

This short survey should serve to give some idea of the benefits that should arise from the new Act in helping to tidy up the many loose ends existing in the past legislation, and how it is hoped to provide a sound basis towards the true and proper protection of our native wild birds which has been so lacking in the past.

In the course of its progress through Parliament, there were many interests to consider, often conflicting, and inevitably there were strong views and some acrimonious exchanges between the sporting and ornithilogical factions and interests. However, much good should be achieved by the new Act as now drafted, and with such a wide field to cover it is not surprising that it should still be open to criticism.

In conclusion, the work being perfomed by the Royal Society for Protection of Birds through the medium of the Educational Authorities to inculcate the true spirit of bird protection in the young is of course invaluable, and the Society needs all the help it can get in its work by increased membership, legacies, donations, etc. Full particulars of this nature and the work now being done can readily be obtained from the Secretary to the R.S.P.B., 25, Eccleston Square, London, S.W.1.

R.N.B.W.S. REFERENCE BOOK LIST

(REVISED 1954)

AREA.	*TITLE.*	*AUTHOR.*	*PUBLISHER.*
WORLD'S OCEANS.	**Birds of the Ocean.* *Supplied to Ships' Reference Libraries. American New Edition £3. Cheaper new edition being printed in U.K., not yet available.	W. B. Alexander.	Putnam & Co., 42 Great Russell St., London, W.C.1. 1928.
NORTH ATLANTIC.	*Sea Birds.*	J. Fisher. R. M. Lockley.	25/-. Collins, 14 St. James Place, London, S.W.1 1954.
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	2. *Collins Pocket Guide to British Birds.*	R. S. R. Fitter. R. A. Richardson.	21/-. Collins. 1952.
	3. *Bird Recognition. Vols.* 1, 2 (3).	J. Fisher.	Pelican Series. 1947-1951.
IRELAND.	*The Birds of Ireland.*	Kennedy. Ruttledge. Scroope.	42/-. W. & G. Foyle, Ltd., 119 Charing Cross Road, London, W.C.2. 1954.
BRITAIN AND ALL EUROPE.	*A Field Guide to the Birds of Britain and Europe.*	R. Peterson. G. Mountfort. P. A. D. Hollom.	25/-. Collins. 1954
SOUTHERN SPAIN AND GIBRALTAR.	*An introduction to the Birds of Southern Spain and Gibraltar.*	A. J. S. Tuke.	5/-. Garrison Library Printing Offices, 2 Library Gdns., Gibraltar. 1953.
PORTUGAL.	*The Birds of Portugal.*	W. C. Tait.	16/6. H. F. & G. Witherby Ltd. 1924.
SOUTH AFRICA.	*The Birds of South Africa.*	A. Roberts.	35/-. H. F. & G. Witherby Ltd. 1942.
WEST AFRICA.	1. *Handbook of the Birds of West Africa.*	G. L. Bates.	30/-. John Bole & Sons & Daniels Ltd., London. 1930.
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	2. *Bird Life in Ceylon.*	Mrs. Cicely Lushington.	

AREA.	*TITLE.*	*AUTHOR.*	*PUBLISHER.*
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	2. *The Book of Indian Birds.*	S. Ali.	Bombay Nat. Hist. Society. 1944.
HONG KONG.	*Birds of Hong Kong.*	G. A. C. Herklots.	
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PACIFIC.	*Birds of the South-west Pacific.*	Ernst Mayr.	22/6. The Macmillon Coy., New York. 1945.
JAPAN.	*Handlist of Japanese Birds.*	M. Hachisuto.	5/9. Ornith. Soc., Japan, c/o Zool: Inst. Science College, Japanese University, Tokio.
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ROYAL NAVAL BIRD WATCHING SOCIETY

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